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John A. Scocos Column:

Honoring Wisconsin Veterans' Legacy of Service

On this Veterans Day, I want to thank each and every person who ever swore an oath and donned the uniform of a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airmen or Coast Guardsman. No matter the era or where duty called you, you took a solemn oath to defend this great nation of ours. That by itself puts you in the minority of our citizenship – a dedicated few who have earned the great esteem of being called a veteran.

Earning this status – and it surely is earned – is not easy. Beyond pledging yourself to something greater than yourself, many of you have been called to action to actually fulfill that pledge. It is one thing to think about patriotism and being a patriot. It's another to say and mean the words "I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same". It's another entirely to answer your nation's call and physically act on that oath – taking up arms against the enemies of our country. Our living veterans have earned their respect by taking up arms in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the first and second Gulf Wars, and Afghanistan, among many others. We have veterans of the Cold War, Grenada, Panama and Somalia. Joining the Armed Forces means the possibility of serving at anytime, anywhere in the world.

While our veterans have served the world over in wars both necessary and not, popular and not, soldiers do not make our nation's foreign policy – they deliver it. They deliver it with boots on the ground and from high in the sky, from rifles and cannons, but also from their presence, professionalism and empathy for those they help after the fight. This world and our veterans themselves have been forever shaped by the places our veterans have been and the things their eyes have seen.

More than 100 years ago militaries from seemingly the world over clashed in Europe, carrying out the orders of their nations's leaders. World War I began in 1914 and most of Europe was at war. That war

left the world with a path to World War II and with many of the final political boundaries and nations we see today, as well as many of the enduring religious, ethnic and political strife that continues to this day.

In 1917, after years of standing by, the United States of America entered into the Great War, as it was then called.

Americans were called upon to serve in great numbers, including of course many Wisconsinites who served with great distinction. From Wisconsin, 122,215 served and 3,932 were casualties.

The end of the Great War came on November 11, 1918 – Armistice Day. It's the day we celebrate today as Veterans Day. As veterans we can all trace our lineage back to a starting point and World War I is no different. Wisconsinites served then as they do now and did before – carrying on the tradition of selfless service and passing it along through others to us today.

While we have no living veterans of World War I – a soldier named Frank Buckles who died in 2011 at the age of 110 was the last living American veteran of the war – we use days like today to remember them.

The history of World War I is a solemn reminder of the cost of war and that time marches on and old veterans fade away, but their memories are kept alive by future generations of veterans.

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(John A. Scocos is Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. He is an Iraq War veteran.)